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## *Mark Twain, Henry James, and Jacksonian Dreaming*

What happens to the Jacksonian style in post-Civil War American literature? Its principal writers perish, fade, fall silent. John Wilkes Booth's manic "Letter to Posterity," James Greenleaf Whittier's depressive *Snowbound*, these are the final soliloquies. What follows are the casualty reports: Walt Whitman's *Drum Taps* (1865), Herman Melville's *Battle Pieces* (1866), and the drifting away of Ralph Waldo Emerson in *May-Day and Other Poems* (1867), in *Society and Solitude* (1870), in *Letters and Social Aims* (1873). The writers who come of age during the Reconstruction, notably Mark Twain and Henry James, refuse to take the romantic question in the Jacksonian text seriously, and when they represent the style in their fiction the expression is invariably lunatic. *The Gilded Age* (1873) and *Roderick Hudson* (1875), present the same sad case of misparentage, the same helpless brothers and doomed daughters, all victims of a beguiling fatherly discourse that is unmistakably Jacksonian in its manic address, its egotistical intensity. Colonel Sellers's commercial tall talk, Roderick Hudson's aesthetic tall talk, this is the delivery of the Jacksonian style in postwar American writing, and here, it might be said, we begin to understand why *Moby Dick* was forgotten and *Leaves of Grass* ignored. Jacksonian speech, ruthlessly expansive, mercilessly optimistic, is the mad speech of the lunatic father, the dangerous hyperbole of the male hysteric. The style is expensive, and its costs are blindness and ruin, impotence and death. Colonel Sellers goes crazy, Roderick Hudson commits suicide. A program of repression is carefully plotted in this fiction and it tells us a great deal about the systematic demeaning of the Jacksonian text in the postwar period, where it is situated, how it is staged, what it excludes.

'The spell is broken, the life-long curse is ended!'<sup>1</sup> Washington Hawkins cries out at the end of his recantation scene in *The Gilded Age*. He has just torn up the tax bill on the Tennessee Land, abandoned the family holdings to public auction, and with this act forsworn the allure of easy fortune. He gives up, that is, a certain

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language, a system of values and attitudes, a mode of self-presentation, a manner of speaking. Hawkins has become a realist. With him in the scene is the original spellbinder, the archepoetic Colonel Sellers, still spellbound, still cursed. Disaster has also befallen the Colonel; he has played his last few chances and lost everything, but he is undeterred: "' . . . and I'll tell you what to do,' says he, 'you go into the law, Colonel Sellers—go into the law, sir; that's your native element!' And into the law the subscriber is going. There's worlds of money in it!—whole worlds of money! Practice first in Hawkeye, then in Jefferson, then in St. Louis, then in New York! In the metropolis of the western world! Climb, and climb, and climb—and wind up on the Supreme Bench. Beriah Sellers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, sir!" (GA, p. 428). James constructs a similar scene near the end of *Roderick Hudson*. A disillusioned, chastened Rowland Mallet looks hard at Hudson, this failed artist in whom he has invested a small fortune of time and feeling. "'It's a perpetual sacrifice,' Mallet says, 'to live with a transcendent egotist.' 'I am an egotist?'"<sup>2</sup> Hudson incredulously inquires. The spell that binds Colonel Sellers and Roderick Hudson is complicated, and so is the curse. It is, after all, in this very style, the Jacksonian style, that John Marshall Clemens and Henry James, Senior, unwittingly deliver the familial curse of ineptitude and failure, of promise unfulfilled, and their voices, enthused, visionary, are present in Colonel Sellers's rhapsodies, in Hudson's egotistical sublime. James's resolution of the spell, his undoing of the curse, is quickly accomplished. The style exists in his fiction after *Roderick Hudson* only as comic relief, as American bluster, American brag, and for that reason his part in this essay is secondary. James's academic reading of the Jacksonian text, taken in the round, composes the figure of a provincial couple. Walt Whitman is "egotistical," "flashy," "aggressively careless," "inelegant." Nathaniel Hawthorne is "charming," "simple," "natural," "childlike."<sup>3</sup> There they stand, the one is loud, the other demure, dismissed. For Mark Twain, who does not have an academic reading of the Jacksonian text, the spellbinding style is everything, the object of his irony, and so long as he has a relation to it, his writing is centered, surefooted.

What is the spell that causes the curse that is confused with the style? Joseph G. Baldwin's *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853) is the standard work on the subject. His analysis of Jacksonian hyperbole in the chapter, "Ovid Bolus, Esquire," informs Mark Twain's deft construction of it in *The Gilded Age*. It is as a reformed

inebriate, ambivalently remembering the first savor of Old Grandiloquence, that Baldwin writes his cautionary treatise. "And what history of that halcyon period ranging from the year of Grace, 1835, to 1837," he asks, "that golden era, when shin-plasters were the sole currency; when bank-bills were as 'thick as Autumn leaves in Val-lambrosa,' and credit was a franchise,—what history of those times would be complete, that left out the name of Ovid Bolus?"<sup>4</sup> Here is the very essence of the Jacksonian speculator. We never learn what he looks like, whether he is tall or short, dark or fair. Ovid Bolus is an activity, a rhetoric, and he is found in all the different Jacksonian discourses. A dealer in notes, patents, certificates, and bank-bills, he is particularly comfortable with that "something sublime" in Emersonian idealism, "this elevating the spirit of man to its true and primeval dominion over things of sense and grossest matter." He, too, is at work on the impalpable, and has the sounding phrase. "How well he asserted the Spiritual over the Material! How he delighted to turn an abstract idea to concrete cash—to make a few blots of ink, representing a little thought, turn out a labor-saving machine, and bring into his pocket money which many days of hard exhausting labor would not procure" (*FT*, p. 5). It is Baldwin's theory that a fatal combination in the Jacksonian economy, a shortage of capital and too much credit, creates Ovid Bolus, casts the glittery spell, generates the glorious style. Flush times in Alabama and Mississippi, the gold rush in California, Ovid Bolus thrives in the early thirties, in the late forties, but when panic comes, and depression, he is gone, vanished. Although modern historiographers have added considerably to that theory—Peter Temin in *The Jacksonian Economy* (1969) talks about trade deficits, Mexican silver, the Opium Wars in China, British banks—Baldwin's explanation, so close to contemporary opinion, is still useful. When the Jacksonians studied the mystery of their convulsive economy, pondered the curse of hard times, they looked primarily at the problem of the money supply, at the issue of unregulated banking, and saw the scandal of untold Boluses, large and small, feverishly printing their own money. Here, amid the imponderables and the enigmas, was an intelligible drama, and the figures in it were sharply defined. They had, in a certain literature, distinctive names: Steadfast Dodge, Aristabulus Bragg, Middleton Flam, Nicodemus Handy, Theodore Fog, Ovid Bolus.

In the political mythology of the period, Andrew Jackson's legendary assault on the Monster, Nicholas Biddle's Second United States Bank, is the constituting act that inflates the period and heightens its

discourse. Braving stiff Whig opposition, overcoming the objection of his reluctant Secretary of the Treasury, Jackson hurls his presidential bolt, releases the federal deposits from the single vault in Biddle's bank, and, in 1832–33, disseminates the treasure, decentralizes the money supply. "Who's over me?" this is Jackson's furious question. Because Jackson brought to the struggle a violence of will and rhetoric, spoke darkly of cabals and conspiracies, gave voice to a widespread populist suspicion of the Bank, took from the few and gave to the many, his action was seen as epochal, and was everywhere, by partisans and opponents alike, mythically interpreted. It did not matter that Jackson was personally a tightfisted, hard-currency man, the removal of the federal deposits had the declarative effect of a magical utterance, an *open sesame*. In *Nature* (1836) Emerson worries about the "prevalence of secondary desires," the dissemination of Flams and Fogs, and considers the effect on language: "new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not: a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults."<sup>5</sup> Whigs were not alone in their anxiety. Nervously aware that Joseph Smith is busily printing money in Ohio, the Angel Moroni returns to the Earth to reclaim the golden tablets and promptly takes them upstairs to a heavenly vault for safekeeping. It is axiomatic in the Jacksonian period that when bullion is scarce and paper money plentiful, when the right ratio is disregarded, there is a subsequent disconnection of language from reality. A pathological condition appears in discourse, the need to inflate meaning and value. "I desire to speak," the Jacksonian writer declares, "somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression."<sup>6</sup>

The spell is complicated, and so is the curse. In his facetious *History of the Wickaboag Bank* (1857), Amasa Walker observes the commonplace, "that banks never originate with those who have money to lend, but with those who wish to borrow,"<sup>7</sup> and then describes in great detail how a Jacksonian bank is established. "The law says," Walker reminds us, "'No bank shall go into operation until one-half, at least, of the capital stock shall have been paid in gold and silver money, and shall be in its vaults, and until the said money shall have been examined by three commissioners appointed by the Governor'" (WB, p. 55), but there are devices, circumventions, methods of engendering something from nothing. Gold is borrowed for a day, visibly on deposit when the commissioners arrive, and gone the next. "The

Wickaboag Bank has now as good a right to issue its notes as money, as any other in the State" (*WB*, p. 56). And it does. As those Three Wise Men, the commissioners, depart, the bank directors notify the engraver. The Wickaboag Bank, the whole Jacksonian enterprise, depends on credit, on confidence, depends on Young America and Manifest Destiny, depends on the validity of the Jacksonian gaze, a gaze bright with purpose, and it thrives so long as there are great borrowers and lavish spenders who do not inquire about the bullion in the vault, who do not doubt the validity of the Jacksonian gaze. The frontispiece to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* reveals this cocksure individual, Young America, shows us, daguerretyped, the resolute gaze. It is a book to be read on the *Fidele*, read and discussed with those boon companions, Frank Goodman and Charlie Noble, masters of the gaze. H. Bruce Franklin plausibly suggests in the Bobbs-Merrill edition that Melville does indeed read *Leaves of Grass* in *The Confidence-Man* (1857), add Whitman to the gallery of self-centered Jacksonian dreamers in the text. Charlie Noble proposes to read a "panegyric on the press," a "sort of free-and-easy chant with refrains to it."<sup>8</sup>

Why not? Why not risk it? It is to meet this question that Walker writes his *History*, to show the mystification and delusion, to argue that such risking induces panic, causes depression. It is, as Baldwin recognizes in *Flush Times*, the urgent question transposed in Jacksonian discourse. When there is no bullion in the bank, when there is a shortage of usable tradition, and the person is actually twice poor, there is a need to borrow, to invent the wherewithal, to produce a new person. Why not? What is Wickaboag's alternative? To drudge and toil in a country and a culture great with choice and chance. If this is reality (Whitman's childhood and early manhood, the life of his father), why not create another, and dwell there? It is Emerson's stirring question: why not make your own meaning? It is Ovid Bolus's question: why not print your own money? Climb, and climb, and climb. The question is writ large. Why not go after the Whale? Who's over you?

Colonel Sellers is old Young America. The gaze, still bright with purpose, is now blind. That this spell, this manner of speaking, Jacksonian dreaming, has come through the Civil War unscathed, still eloquent, still speaking, is the pressing curse in *The Gilded Age* and *Roderick Hudson*, the single subject. The spellbound find themselves in a changed world, unable to realize it, to speak it. Hudson knows where he is, in a cautious mid-Victorian society that is contentedly post-heroic, post-romantic, and he hates it. "It is against the taste of

the day, I know," Hudson declares, "we have really lost the faculty of understanding beauty in the large ideal way." What follows is Emersonian scripture: "We stand like a race with shrunken muscles, staring helplessly at the weights our forefathers easily lifted. But I don't hesitate to proclaim it—I mean to lift them again! I mean to go in for big things; that is my notion of my art. I mean to do things that will be simple and vast and infinite!" (*RH*, p. 94). Colonel Sellers has an eyewash to proclaim, the *Infallible Imperial Oriental Optic Liniment and Salvation for Sore Eyes*. "Now do I look like a man—does my history suggest that I am a man who deals in trifles, contents himself with the narrow horizon that hems in the common herd, sees no further than the end of his nose?" The Colonel gazes authoritatively at an impressed Washington Hawkins. "Now you know that that is not me—couldn't be me! You ought to know that if I throw my time and abilities into a patent medicine, it's a patent medicine whose field of operations is the solid earth! its clients the swarming nations that inhabit it" (*GA*, p. 59). Neither speaker has anything else to say. They deliver monologues, do soliloquies. Trapped in an egocentric style that does not admit true knowledge of the real world, this post-Civil War world, each sees no further than the end of his nose. "I am an egotist?" Hudson incredulously inquires. And this, of course, is the primary repression in each novel, the infantilizing of the Jacksonian Parent, his discourse, his style. That Jacksonian writers could be ironic in their elaborate style, this admission is not found in the post-war reading.

The egotism that is at the center of each fiction is therefore already emptied. This is, as it were, its curse-value, that it is empty, that it lacks bullion, lacks substance. Colonel Sellers has a certain vivacity, Roderick Hudson some talent, but from the start they are fairly registered by their superlatives, immobilized. They are an object-lesson, old and young versions of the same male narcissism, the same impossible desire. James Lampton, a family relative, an associate of John Marshall Clemens, and a fellow-dreamer, is the principal model for Colonel Sellers. Lampton, Mark Twain writes, "floated all his days in a tinted mist of dreams and died at last without seeing one of them realized."<sup>9</sup> If the prospect is so hideous, the style so clearly narcotic, what, then, is its attractive power? James anticipates the question in his preface to *Roderick Hudson*, admits that Hudson "falls to pieces" at too fast a rate, effectively concedes that there is not enough to Roderick, in Roderick, to sustain a complex treatment. "'On the basis of so great a weakness,' one hears the reader say, 'where was your



idea of the interest? On the basis of so great an interest, where is the provision for so much weakness?" (RH, p. 17). As the elder James sees it, looking back at the composition of his first serious novel, the problem is technical, the "eternal time question," and he remembers being "maddened" by the thought that Balzac would have easily solved the problem of Hudson's weakness, Hudson's precipitous decline. Indeed how does it happen that this egotism, which is never for a moment given credence, is at the center of the novel, is the name of the novel? We see the reality it seeks to transcend: the squalor of provincial Hawkeye in *The Gilded Age*, the swamp and mire of the rural South, the narrow confines of uptight Northampton in *Roderick Hudson*, that small New England horizon; we see, that is, what drives this egotism to the strong drink of the exhilarating style, but it is, all the same, the wrong response to lack. Tireless speakers, heapers of verbiage, Colonel Sellers and Roderick Hudson are effectively silenced. They bring no question to the dialogical play in the fiction. Their function is to fascinate, to be the object labelled *poison*.

Here, then, is the patrimony of the Jacksonian period, the literary legacy of the fathers, a spell to be dispelled, a curse to be undone. The style can reach this far: it can sing the song of myself, and here it is stopped, arrested in its development. Hudson's first significant work of art, the bronze statuette that brings him to Mallet's attention, his best piece really, is of a "naked youth drinking from a gourd" (RH, p. 33). It is called *Thirst*, and when Mallet contemplates it, he is struck by its homoerotic soulfulness. He sees predictably the "beautiful youth," sees Narcissus. The Colonel desires to be a founder, the builder of empires, but his schemes are all patently childish play. In perhaps the most poignant scene in *The Gilded Age*, the Colonel constructs a model of the railroad that will traverse his projected empire. He does it on the dining-room table for the edification of his children, using a tumbler, salt-cellar, comb, sugar bowl, skeins of thread, James Fitz-James's toy horse, whatever is at hand, and he explains as he goes along. "And there we strike Columbus River—pass me two or three skeins of thread to stand for the river; the sugar bowl will do for Hawkeye, and the rat trap for Stone's Landing—Napoleon, I mean—and you can see how much better Napoleon is located than Hawkeye. Now here you are with your railroad complete, and showing its continuation to Hallelujah, and thence to Corruptionville" (GA, p. 186). It is a rickety affair, the railroad Mark Twain puts before us, using something of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, something of Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad," commercial slogans, patriotic



platitudes, the rhetoric of mid-century evangelism, and what is its destination? Napoleon. The Colonel's railroad, like Hudson's statuette, is instant with desire. It is the Napoleonic play of the child, the Napoleonic fantasy of the youth, constructing at once the self and the dominion with tumblers and hyperbole. It is just that, and nothing more. This piece of juvenile bricolage is the closest the railroad ever comes to actual construction. The father is at play with his children, at their level. Hudson can only sculpt ideal forms, and sculpt only when inspired. Commissioned to do a statue representing "Culture," a project doomed from the beginning, Hudson refuses to accept the critical suggestions of the American businessman who has ordered the work, throws an astonishing tantrum, breaks the contract, abandons the unfinished statue.

What, James asks, is the interest in so much weakness? With this question, at this stoppage of development, Narcissus-Napoleon, the two novels, the one freighted with economic language, the other with artistic discourse, intersect—what is socio-economic is psycho-sexual—and then the narrative lines considerably diverge. The Jacksonian style is unquestionable, a constant, but Mark Twain and James have a different relation to it, a different solution, and the way they organize the critical response, dramatize the dispelling, prefigures their subsequent development as writers. There are continuations past Narcissus-Napoleon. James, of course, has a ticket for Hallelujah; Mark Twain is bound for Corruptionville.

Sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, they are the intelligence in *The Gilded Age* and *Roderick Hudson*. They confront the glitter of this homoerotic egotism, this song of myself, and suffer the economic and psychological consequences. Colonel Sellers is the sponsoring figure for Washington and Laura Hawkins, the visionary stepfather. The allure of Roderick Hudson's romantic genius draws both Mallet's brotherly and Christina Light's sisterly dedication. Even when Christina is thoroughly disillusioned, when she has rejected Hudson as a possible suitor, she still sees what is "very fine about him," the boldness of his gesture, the bravery of his assertion. She wishes "he were my brother, so that he could never talk to me about marriage. Then I could adore him. I would nurse him, I would wait on him and save him from all disagreeable rubs and shocks" (*RH*, p. 275). The question is, from novel to novel, which is the significant character in each pairing? Mark Twain strongly imagines the son, is self-interested in Washington's recovery, his break into realism. His treatment of the daughter is shallow, perfunctorily melodramatic. James discovers his

strong interest in the brilliant sister, and by the middle of the novel she is so forceful a presence, so interesting, that her significance begins to overshadow Hudson's. In Mallet, who helps Hudson escape Northampton, who funds the young sculptor's Italian sojourn, James creates an older brother too decent by far, and virtually dull. It is the son, it is the sister, who respectively pose the important question in *The Gilded Age* and *Roderick Hudson*.

Other voices, other perspectives, inform each narrative. There is, for example, the good half of *The Gilded Age* that Charles Dudley Warner writes, the Northern and success-filled part of this jointly composed novel. A sterling couple, Philip Sterling, a plucky entrepreneur with the know-how of an engineer, and plain Ruth Bolton, a conscientious young woman who is studying medicine, teach us the value of bullion in the bank, of having substance. They are the winners in *The Gilded Age*, the very figures of Knowledge and Production in the postwar period—Northerners, and college-trained. Badly tutored, mercurial, gambling Southerners, the worst kind, Washington and Laura Hawkins are the losers. The principal figures of knowledge and production in *Roderick Hudson*, of patient objectivity and acquired technique, are little Singleton and great Gloriani, both of whom, as artists, admire the energy of Hudson's work, but who do their own work in the contemporary mode. "You remind me of a watch that never runs down," Hudson tells Singleton. "If one listens hard one hears you always—tic-tic, tic-tic" (*RH*, p. 323). Singleton is indeed self-winding, an indefatigable worker, an alert student of pictorial phenomena, always sketching, taking notes. He is the Jamesian equivalent of Warner's methodical Philip Sterling. Mark Twain and James believe in these values, espouse the ideology of sweat, of digging, of plan, of craft, of patience, of pleasure deferred, but the feeling in their fiction is not found here.

In 1865, James, then twenty two, writes a review of Whitman's *Drum Taps* for the *Nation* that begins with this statement: "It has been a melancholy task to read this book; and it is a still more melancholy one to write about it."<sup>10</sup> Whitman is an embarrassment, his poetry vigorously bad, and the youthful James, for the most part, is coolly patronizing: "our author's novelty . . . is not in his words, but in the form of his writing. As we have said, it begins for all the world like verse and turns out to be arrant prose" (*WW*, p. 134). In 1903 James would renounce this critique, call it a "disgrace," and yet, slight as the piece is in the conspectus of James's criticism, the review is nonetheless telling in its curiosity. James here confronts the gaze in

the Jacksonian style, that unsettling look demanding of the reader a collaborative intimacy: *And what I assume, you shall assume*. The reader's response in the review is striking. He adopts a rhetorical device, a defensive strategy, that instantly brings into view the forthcoming relation of Christina Light to Roderick Hudson, the relation of Isabel Archer to Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), a host of such relations. That is, James adopts the pose and the voice of an intelligent woman. *She* looks into the gaze of this egotism, *she* confronts the first person singular of the Jacksonian style, and it is *she* who judges it.

What is it, after all, that shines in Whitman's Jacksonian gaze, that is so mesmerizing? There are "wanton eccentricities" in Whitman's "vaticinations," something in "Mr. Whitman's attitude" that "seems monstrous." It is, James deviously explains, this: Whitman insists the reader assume the power of his own egotism, lift and liberate it, in order to assume (to read properly, to be one with) Whitman's discourse. This is a projected consciousness, an Ego that bids you enter, be one with it, awake to it, an Ego that declines the negativity of irony, refuses to play literary games. Whitman understands, and everywhere discusses it, that the reader is afraid, is repressed. *Open sesame*, Whitman's poetry begins with this magical utterance. Who's over you? This attitude, James argues, "is monstrous because it pretends to persuade the soul while it slights the intellect; because it pretends to gratify the feelings while it outrages the taste. The point is that it does this *on theory*, willfully, consciously, arrogantly. It is the little nursery game of 'open your mouth and shut your eyes.' Our hearts are often touched through a compromise with the artistic sense, but never in direct violation of it. Mr. Whitman sits down at the outset and counts out the intelligence" (WW, p. 135). Here James concludes his section of the review. Henceforth there is another speaker.

*Open your mouth and shut your eyes*. The sister in this little nursery game is called Intelligence. Discounted, she "takes her revenge by simply standing erect and open-eyed" (WW, p. 135). Everything she says to Mr. Whitman, Christina Light says to Roderick Hudson, Isabel Archer says to Gilbert Osmond. "For a lover," Intelligence declares, returning Whitman's Jacksonian gaze, "you talk entirely too much about yourself." What is this egotism that "threatens to absorb Kanada," incarnates New York, calls itself the Holy Spirit, but an egotism that excludes this critical sister. "For a poet who claims to sing 'the idea of all,'" Intelligence remarks, "this is tolerably egotistical. We

look in vain, however, through your books for a single idea. We find nothing but flashy imitations of ideas. We find a medley of extravagances and commonplaces." Oh, the *ressentiment* of sisterly intelligence, this brief little Jamesian character born in 1865. "To be positive," she continues, "one must have something to say; to be positive requires reason, labor, and art; and art requires, above all things, a suppression of one's self, a subordination of one's self to an idea. This will never do for you, whose plan is to adapt the scheme of the universe to your own limitations" (WW, p. 136). She wants to feel, in brief, substance, the weighty thing, bullion, the phallus, in this highflying style, and where is it? She, too, has an ego, a sacred flame. She can appreciate the boldness of the romantic assertion, the bravery of its gesture, but what is for her in this presently constituted homoerotic egotism if it cannot recognize her?

Christina deals Roderick his fatal wound. You are weak, she says. Incomplete, he protests. She has dreamed of another, she says. Whom, he asks. "'A man I can perfectly respect,' cried the young girl with a sudden flame. 'A man whom I can unrestrictedly admire! I meet one, as I have met more than one before, whom I fondly believe to be cast in a larger mould than most of the vulgar human breed—to be large in character, great in talent, strong in will! In such a man as that, I say, one's weary imagination at last may rest; or it may wander if it will, yet never need to wander far from the deeps where one's heart is anchored. When I first knew you I gave no sign, but you had struck me. I observed you as women observe, and I fancied you had the sacred flame'" (RH, p. 181). So she withholds her consent, refuses to believe in Hudson's power, his ability to produce "splendid achievement," and herein poor Hudson is fated to admit the weakness of his dependence. He needs her to believe in him, to affirm his genius, to meet the challenge of his gaze when he announces his work, the subjects he proposes to sculpt: "I mean to do the Morning; I mean to do the Night! I mean to do the Ocean and the Mountains; the Moon and the West Wind. I mean to make a magnificent statue of America!" (RH, p. 95). Christina will concede this much to Hudson, that he has a certain force, a certain promise, but the glance at his work is condescending. It is like the glance Intelligence gives to Mr. Whitman, like the glance Alice James gives to the *Literary Remains* of Henry James, Senior. "The rich robustness of father's texture," Alice writes, "is simply overpowering when you have been divorced from it for a little, and I hadn't looked into the *Literary Remains* for a good while. What 'fun' it must have been to roll out his

adjectives. And the curious thing is that notwithstanding the broad swing and sweeping volume of the current, his style never mastered him and degenerated into 'manner,' but in the least little note springs as from a living fountain, as unconscious as a singing bird."<sup>11</sup> The speech was grand, the speaker ineffectual, "unconscious," really. Father's masterpiece, an unfinished work, is entitled *Spiritual Creation*. He meant to do the Morning and the Night, to adapt the scheme of the universe to his own limitations.

In her description of that ideal man "large in character, great in talent, strong in will," Christina, of course, describes an idealized image of herself. She has, for that matter, her severe gaze in *Roderick Hudson*, and where is the severe man who can equably face it? Unlike Hudson, who is given extraordinary assistance, whose egotism is indulged and tolerated, who has opportunities placed at his feet, Christina is trapped in a life that is inflexibly arranged. She has been fashioned from childhood to be a sexual object, a rare purchase. Her marriage is fixed. She is to be a Princess. Neither crazy Hudson nor cool Mallet can help her from this imprisonment. She does not want to be Hudson's object, his idealized model, his inspiration. She wants rather to break into the aloof discourse Mallet speaks, to know about things, to understand techniques, to be the judge and not the judged. To the older brother who is assiduously helping the younger and profligate brother, the sister says, in effect, *see me, help me*. In *Roderick Hudson* the very idea of such help is seen as impossible. Herein Christina Light, enlightened, prepares for her next role as the heroine of *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), an ampler fiction, a tougher text, where she will contrive, alone, hopelessly, to break from the Keep of her name, Princess. Hudson turns inward, upon the allegorical and the symbolic, to search for the supreme expression. Christina will try to turn outward, upon the cultural and the political, to know the complexity.

Through his identification with the shrewd sister, his understanding of her critique, James demystifies the sell of Hudsonian romanticism. "I mean to do the Morning; I mean to do the Night; I mean to make a magnificent statue of America!" This is the speculative talk that goes on in the Jacksonian style, a style that demands, at high risk, large investment in its great intention. It is broad of swing, this style, and sweeping in its volume. It does not exhibit the discourse of mastery. James virtually discards Hudson in the novel, loses interest in him, throws him off a cliff. As he dumps Hudson, James also rejects the romance of personal rebellion, the mythos of social revolu-

tion, belief in radical liberation. There is no patrimony from Emerson and Whitman. Their transformations are the stuff of comedy. The father came up empty. "This play of his remarkable genius," James writes of his father's work in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), "brought him in fact throughout the long years no ghost of a reward in form of pence, and could proceed to publicity, as it repeatedly did, not only by the copious and resigned sacrifice of such calculations, but by his meeting in every single case all the expenses of the process. The untiring impulse to this devotion figured for us, comprehensively and familiarly, as 'Father's Ideas,' of the force and truth of which in his own view we were always so respectfully, even though at times so bewilderedly and confoundly persuaded, that we felt there was nothing in his exhibition of life that they didn't or couldn't account for."<sup>12</sup> James will adopt different masters, study the significance of realism in European painting and literature, study a different exhibition of life, but it is the sister's question, the sister's intelligence, that is decisive for him in this turning.

Where is Washington Hawkins at the end of *The Gilded Age*? He has broken the spell, ended the curse, seen through the style. He has not, however, displaced the Colonel's appeal. It is only when the Colonel discourses that *The Gilded Age* has poetic intensity. As the imaginary railroad traverses the Colonel's empire on the dining-room table, it picks up steam, accelerates, becomes a triumphant rush: "And just look at that river—noblest stream that meanders over the thirsty earth!—calmest, gentlest artery that refreshes her weary bosom! Railroad goes all over it and all through it—wades right along on stilts. Seventeen bridges in three miles and a half—forty-nine bridges from Hark-from-the-Tomb to Stone's Landing altogether—forty-nine bridges, and culverts enough to culvert creation itself! Hadn't skeins of thread enough to represent them all—but you get the idea—perfect trestle-work of bridges for seventy-two miles" (GA, pp. 187–88). Ovid Bolus, it will be remembered, also believed in "this elevating the spirit of man to its true and primeval dominion over things of sense and grossest matter" (FT, p. 5), believed in the stride and leap of the Colonel's trestled bridges. When *The Gilded Age* is about this, elevation, bridge-work, and it very often is, and not about the perversion of the goals of the Civil War and Reconstruction, not about the corruption of American politics, its specific issues, its stated subject, the text, it might be said, is truly centered. There is, of course, a complicity, and Washington Hawkins at last comes to see it. The Colonel's dreamy bridge-work, leaping the pits of sense and

grossest matter, leads him straight to postwar Washington D.C., to the pork barrel. Piggish senators and greedy congressmen eagerly appropriate and debase the Colonel's grand design, and the Colonel will not, cannot, acknowledge the result—catastrophe, ruin. He builds instead another bridge. With that final bridge, that last piece of Jacksonian dreaming, Mark Twain draws the *reductio* of the optative Jacksonian mood, and yet it is the Colonel's gilding discourse that is golden in *The Gilded Age*.

The stripped, unvarnished world into which Washington Hawkins steps at the end of the novel, the world of sober drudgery, of cautious choices, is indeed the real world, the world of Hartford, Connecticut, and Mark Twain affirms it, affirms it repeatedly, gives it lip service, but it is never for a moment his subject. His subject is Jacksonian dreaming, the style, its egotism, its sensibility, which he demeans so brilliantly in the first phase of his career, 1865–1875, that the paradox of its repeated significance is always before us. What is shown to be empty, bare of substance, bankrupt, is in fact full, rich, golden, the mine itself. It is, in brief, Mark Twain's material, the "low-born" stuff of a conventional humorous mode that he had imaginatively refined. In *Roughing It* (1872), prospecting along the Humboldt River, the ingenu believes he has struck at once silver and gold. It is shining all around him. Delirious, he experiences something like "unmarred ecstasy," and then learns his ore is "nothing but a lot of granite rubbish and nasty glittering mica that isn't worth ten cents an acre!" What follows is the moral, the lesson Washington Hawkins is to learn in *The Gilded Age*: ". . . *nothing* that glitters is gold. So I learned then, once for all, that gold in its native state is but dull, unornamental stuff, and that only low-born metals excite the admiration of the ignorant with an ostentatious glitter. However, like the rest of the world, I still go on underrating men of gold and glorifying men of mica."<sup>13</sup> Other miners had indeed previously worked this lode, showing up the glitter of mica against the Golden Rule: Baldwin, Johnson Jones Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, the Southwestern humorists, and worked it with the same ambivalence. For in this lode there is nothing but mica. Mica is the resource, its glitter the subject. As Washington Hawkins steps into the sobriety of a realistic life, to follow the Golden Rule, he steps out of Mark Twain's imagination.

That is, Mark Twain's ironic reading of the Jacksonian style takes place within the style, is written from the vantage-point of a preeminently Jacksonian form, the tall tale. *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *Roughing It* are effectively assemblages of tall tales. Colonel Sellers'



tall tales are the only evidence of artistic virtuosity in *The Gilded Age*, extractable, like songs from an opera. Mastery of the tall tale constitutes Mark Twain's early achievement as a humorist, and brings him gold. Yet the tall tale is what, a nihilist joke? As it explodes the grandiose fiction by hyper-inflating its exaggeration, exposes the lie, the tall tale implies another vision, another telling, but what is it? The tall tale does not open upon the epistemology of Courbet and Flaubert. Obsessed by the obsessiveness of this egotistical performance, inflation of self, inflation of experience, the teller of the tall tale is fated to follow the activity, to remark and remind, to deflate. The "Oration at Adam's Tomb" in *Innocents Abroad*, "Jim Blaine and His Grandfather's Ram" in *Roughing It*, Colonel Sellers's diverse spiels in *The Gilded Age*, these tales are all equivalent, numbers in a routine, the glitter of which had begun to appall Mark Twain in the middle of the eighteen seventies. Washington Hawkins may break free in *The Gilded Age*, but it would seem that Colonel Sellers is still in charge of Mark Twain's literary career, still giving him his best lines. Washington Hawkins must give up believing in tall tales. Mark Twain must cease telling them.

How to escape the limitation of the form? How to escape the egotism that informs it? The resolutions of *Roughing It* and *The Gilded Age* reveal Mark Twain's quandary. He hangs up his sign at the end of *Roughing It*: Comic Lecturer, Professional Humorist. "For other people there was facetiousness in the last line of my posters, but to me it was plaintive with a pang when I wrote it: 'Doors open at 7½. The trouble will begin at 8'' (*RI*, p. 493). It is not the fortune the ingenu sought in the Wild West. He was dreamily looking to strike gold. He was simply on the make, chancing ventures. It is rather the fortune found, the true fortune—an antidote for mania. Here it is: the eyewash of humorous vision. The humorist who now stands before us retrospectively illuminates and clarifies the structure of *Roughing It*. This narrative is at once autobiography and a performance, life as a tall tale, and told to this effect, that mania, the Jacksonian curse, is controllable, if not curable. Here is the doctor, and this is the dosage: "Doors open at 7½. The trouble will begin at 8." The two concluding chapters in which Mark Twain relates the triumph of his inaugural performance in San Francisco and then the triumph of his return to Virginia City as a comic lecturer (where he is the butt of a practical joke) are delicately artful in their self-deprecation. They are, as it were, demonstrations of the cure. None of Mark Twain's precursors had managed to find such usage for the tall tale, such a complication

of form and voice, and the exhilaration of that success led Mark Twain directly to the "higher" form of the contemporary novel, to what is, strictly speaking, his first novel, his part of *The Gilded Age*. Here, within new and somewhat alien formal constraints, he restages the curse, restates the cure, and the trouble begins.

The novel demands, Mark Twain realized, a love interest, and he dutifully discharges this obligation in *The Gilded Age*. There is a sensational romance full of scandalous desire, but the play of it is interpolative, to the side of Mark Twain's primary interest in Washington Hawkins's fascination. Laura Hawkins has indeed nothing to do with that fascination. "She did not by any means share all the delusions of the family; but her brain was not seldom busy with schemes about it [the Tennessee Land]. Washington seemed to her only to dream of it and to be willing to wait for its riches to fall upon him in a golden shower; but she was impatient, and wished she were a man to take hold of the business" (GA, pp. 136–37). Laura quickly realizes that the only immediate fortune to be extracted from the Tennessee Land must come through skillful fraud, and to that end she toils with Senator Dilworthy, her mentor in chicanery, to secure a large federal appropriation. It is a gilded appropriation. The federal government will purchase the Tennessee Land, still a primeval wilderness, and there establish (with lucrative contracts let all the way down the line to the last brick) a vocational institute for worthy Negroes. Laura is, to this extent, a cunning realist, a coldblooded charmer, but she is also volatile, irrational, madly in love with a married Colonel Selby. When Selby spurns her, she shoots him. Mark Twain abruptly dismisses her. She is, after all, unrepentant. He turns, with obvious relief, to satirize the press coverage of Laura's trial, to demean the sophisticated rhetoric of flamboyant defense lawyers, and the energy expended here is considerable. It is a subject he knows: the inflation of meaning, the inflation of feeling, excited discourse. Everyone associated with the trial is swollen with self-importance. In this overheated circus atmosphere, where eloquence is cheap, the very air clogged with superlatives, how is justice done, Mark Twain wants to know, and what happens to respect for the law?

It is the one section in *The Gilded Age* where Mark Twain, lunging into free-swinging attacks on the jury system and ignorant Irish judges, is out of control, in direst need of sisterly intelligence. Instead he becomes Laura's testy prosecutor, impugns her attorney's defense, believes she should be stiffly punished, and reports, quite disgustingly, the "not guilty" verdict. When she takes to the lecture tour,

with this subject: "The Revelations of a Woman's Life," Mark Twain inflicts his own just punishment on her. For Laura, the trouble begins at 8. She is about to give her first performance, and mustering her courage. The agent drops by to check on her. "Do not disturb me," Laura says grandly. "I want no introduction. And do not fear for me; the moment the hands point to eight I will step upon the platform" (GA, p. 421). She finds the house almost empty. The few who are there are wretches and drunkards who pelt her with refuse. She promptly dies of heart failure.

Laura Hawkins is Mark Twain's sore point in *The Gilded Age*, his plight. She marks the place where he will remain, as a novelist, vulnerable, inept. Her sad lecture, 'The Revelations of a Woman's Life,' is not in Mark Twain's repertoire. It is true, after all, that women have no place in Jacksonian dreaming, no voice in the tall tale. Tellers of tall tales are men derisively fascinated by the spectacle of male egotism, and to that extent spellbound. "The real Colonel Sellers, as I knew him in James Lampton, was a pathetic and beautiful spirit," Mark Twain writes in the *Autobiography*, "a manly man, a straight and honorable man, a man with a big, foolish, unselfish heart in his bosom, a man born to be loved; and he was loved by all his friends, and by his family worshipped" (AMT, p. 19). In *Mark Twain and The Gilded Age* (1965), Bryant M. French remarks the fate of Lampton's eldest daughter who, demented, suffering from delusions, had finally to be committed to a state asylum. To turn from Colonel Sellers, to turn from the tall tale, Mark Twain, it would seem, must follow Washington Hawkins out the door into a new representation of the demystified world. There it is, the grown-up world of the Reconstruction, the phase of marriage, of sensible accommodation, and there is no place in it for a Jacksonian cockalorum. *The Gilded Age* is a threshold text, but one in which Mark Twain discovers an impasse. Unlike James, who crosses his threshold in *Roderick Hudson* holding on to Ariadne's thread, following Christina Light, Mark Twain does not have an "erect and open-eyed" sister to give him perspective, to show him passage. Nor, for that matter, does he have access to the newest machinery, the productive techniques of European literary realism. In 1873 Mark Twain is still within the stylistic system of Jacksonian writing, this homoerotic universe of hyperbolic discourse, still before his resource, this lode of mica, revealing its falsity.

The reconstruction of American writing in the postwar period, as Edmund Wilson describes it in *Patriotic Gore* (1962), crucially involves a demeaning of the Jacksonian text, the "chastening of the

American prose style," and his revealing texts are John W. De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) and *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (1885). To demonstrate the virtues of De Forest's lucidity and Grant's tightened sentence, Wilson gives us a review of the Jacksonian style. "In the field of prose fiction before the war, the American writers, both North and South, had a verbose untidy model in the novels of Walter Scott." He then briefly dismisses James Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe. "Hawthorne and Melville and Poe," Wilson allows, "were capable of much greater concentration; but Poe sometimes and the other two always embroidered, or, perhaps better, coagulated, their fancies in a peculiar clogged and viscous prose characteristic of the early nineteenth century."<sup>14</sup> It is a remarkable section in *Patriotic Gore*, this reading, and it ends with Wilson in bed trying to read Melvillean prose and falling asleep. Much of this critique is simply Wilsonian *chutzpah*, a droll corrective applied to F. O. Matthiessen's enthused and reigning *American Renaissance* (1941), and yet Wilson had himself directly experienced the boom in the nineteen twenties, the bust in the thirties, and could count, as he did, the insanities and the suicides. His jaundiced reading of the Jacksonian prose style is not all that distant from the drastic interpretation offered in Yvor Winters's *In Defense of Reason* (1947). "The doctrines of Emerson and Whitman," Winters declares, "if really put into practice, should naturally lead to suicide: in the first place, if the impulses are indulged systematically and passionately, they can lead only to madness; in the second place, death, according to the doctrine, is not only a release from suffering but is also and inevitably the way to beatitude."<sup>15</sup> Emerson and Whitman, Winters insists, killed Hart Crane.

It is this threat in the father's bardic speech that sons in the eighteen seventies could only comically represent. They knew their fathers, saw them as poignant cases of arrested emotional development, saw them trapped in fantasies, childlike in their narcissism, saw them as obscurely castrated, without real paternal power. The postwar writers did not see Emerson and Whitman as killers. James does not hold Emerson culpable when Roderick Hudson leaps from a cliff in the Alps. Who invented the doctrine that drives Colonel Sellers crazy? The question in the Jacksonian text: "Who's over me?" is simply not admitted. So we see, through the comic screening of filial caricature, the absolute failure of the style, its bankruptcy. We see a suicide without integrity, an insanity that is only pathetic. Such a judgment of Jacksonian writing, dismissive, punishing, does its own

particular violence to the Jacksonian text, reveals within its patronizing language untold anxieties, curious repressions, and a secret dread. What is not seen when Mark Twain and James look, spellbound, into the Jacksonian gaze? Everything we see.

### Notes

1. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (New York: Trident Press, 1964), p. 429. Subsequent reference will be indicated GA in the text.
2. Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 337. Subsequent reference will be indicated RH in the text.
3. Although James reads certain Jacksonian writers tenderly, Emerson, Thoreau, Lowell, the tone is always condescending. He would change his opinion of Whitman's poetry. In the eighteen nineties, James becomes affectionate, bemused. He calls Whitman "The good Walt" in an 1898 review of *The Wound Dresser*. Hawthorne is the only Jacksonian writer to receive James's protracted study. Written on assignment, James's book, *Hawthorne*, appeared in an *English Men of Letters* series in 1879.
4. Joseph G. Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (New York: D. Appleton, 1853), p. 1. Subsequent reference will be indicated FT in the text.
5. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, An Organic Anthology*, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 33.
6. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 214.
7. Amasa Walker, *The Nature and Uses of Money and Mixed Currency with a History of the Wickaboag Bank* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Co., 1857), p. 53. Subsequent reference will be indicated WB in the text.
8. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, ed. H. Bruce Franklin (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1967), p. 235.
9. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Washington Square Press, 1959), p. 19. Subsequent reference will be indicated AMT in the text.
10. *The American Essays of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Vintage, 1956), p. 131. Subsequent reference will be indicated WW in the text.
11. *The James Family: A Group Biography*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 101.
12. Henry James, *Autobiography: A Small Boy and Others, Notes of a Son and Brother, The Middle Years*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), p. 330.
13. Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, ed. Paul Baender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 197. Subsequent reference will be indicated RI in the text.
14. Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 636.
15. Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (Denver: Allan Swallow, 1947), p. 590.